



Changes and Emerging Trends in Lotha Naga Marriage System

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Abstract:

The social institution of marriage is one of the oldest in human society and one of the intricate and most complex involvements of human relationships that have social significance. It is an institution with a complex of norms that sanctions the relationship between a man and a woman and binds them in a system of mutual obligations essential to the functioning of family life. The Lotha society has undergone various social changes in the last 100 years, and the institution of marriage has had a great impact on change and it continues to change and add new trends in the system. This article is a part of ongoing PhD study on the marriage presentation and emergence trends. Since this is an ongoing social phenomenon for this article 20 person both gender were interviewed randomly from Wokha town. It is imperative to note here that the advent of Christianity has been considered as one of the important benchmarks or points of reference for defining the before and after. This article will analysis on the marriage system of the Lothas its changing pattern and emerging trends in the institution.

Keywords: Changing pattern, emerging trends, marriage and family, Lotha, Nagas

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I. INTRODUCTION

Lothas are one of the major tribes of Naga in Nagaland predominantly inhabited in the Wokha district. Like the word Naga the derivation of the word Lotha is obscure. It has been interpreted in various ways. According to Zanao Mozhui, *Lo* means sacrifice or offering, *That* means fully or satisfactorily (2004:04). Therefore Lotha means people who fully sacrificed to the satisfaction of the Gods. Another interpretation is that the word came from the Khuza language *Latha* which means gone to a far-off place or gone ahead. This theory is postulated because the British first encountered the Khuzas and Angamis in the In the 1930s and they might have acquired the name Lotha from the Khuza word *Latha*. Another interpretation is that their original name was *Kyong* which means human. J. P. Mills mentions that the Lothas called themselves as *kyon*, meaning simply Man (1922: 01). Lothas do not have any difference in language between the upper and Lower Lothas except for some slight differences in dialect (Ghosh, 1979:30).

The Lotha society is patriarchal, patrilineal and patrilocal. The line of succession among the Lothas follows the male heir pattern thus father is the head of the family. The whole Lotha community is divided into different clan groups which come under three phartries: i. *Limhathung rui*, ii. *Limhachan- tonphaktsu rui* and iii. *Ezonmontsu rui*¹. The Lothas commonly practice the exogamy system of marriage. One of the social ties in the community was rooted in inter-clan marriage which directly or indirectly, promoted mutual understanding and kinship relations. Marriage is not just a social construct, but a cultural universal. Cultural connections between different groups are strengthened and established through marriage.

Owing to the adoption of the Christian faith and belief and education, the Lotha society has witnessed several social changes, including the marriage system. It has changed the form of compromise between indigenous practices and Christian values. As Kikon (2016, 197) mentioned, at present Lothas practices a combination of Christian marriage and indigenous marriage system with traces of traditional customs observable

¹ The Lotha have 22 different clans, and the clans are divided into these three phartries. Rui in this case means descendants

in a Christian church marriage. There is a shift from traditional marriage to the western practices of white weddings in the church. Like any other society swept by the wave of westernization, the Lotha tribe is fully blended with western ideals and traditional institutions.

FACTORS OF CHANGE IN LOTHAS SOCIETY

I. Religion as a factor

According to Sanyu (1996) among the many forces that came to penetrate the North Eastern region along with the colonial rulers, the introduction of Christianity stood out in playing a significant role in the process of modernization. He wrote, "if one responsible, dynamic factor were to be singled out for an overall change in the life of the Nagas, it would undoubtedly be the introduction of Christianity among them". There is characteristic compatibility between religious institutions and social structures at any stage of social development. Having come into contact with Christian missionaries during the British period, there was a case of religious change among the Lothas. In other words, Lotha marriage today has found a middle ground where elements of traditional customs are observable in a Christian marriage and elements of a Christian marriage (Kikon, 2016, 198). An illustration is that traditionally the Lotha marriage ends on the day of giving and receiving of *hanlam voko*² (pig) by the groom to the bride's family however, today the receiving and giving of *hanlam* are fixed three days before the church wedding.

II. Economic as a factor

Economic factors influence the direction of social change. The effect of these factors has a major underpinning on affecting the way of life of societies under change. Just like most tribal societies of the world that have experienced a change in their economic systems; the Lotha society also is not devoid of the same with changes such as the introduction of money, establishment of means of transport and communication and employment opportunities outside the village. The changing economy of the Lotha thus has gone from a subsistence economy to a cash economy or more particularly from a clan economy to a modern economy (Imrongsungba, 2015, 42).

With elements of modernity dawning, it has had an impact on the Lotha economy throughout time, thereby paving the way for modern elements in other areas of social life. The change in the economic system today which centres on an urban-based economy has resulted in the rise of a greater economic role on the part of women. To cope with the demands of modern economic life, there has arisen greater economic independence for women as they have become involved in the labour force outside their domestic space at home and thereby in recent times they also contribute to the economic well-being of the family as a whole.

III. Education as a factor

Education does not directly bring about social change but it facilitates it. It is through education that society is provided with opportunities and experiences through which the individual can cultivate to adjust to the emerging needs and philosophy of changing modern society.

According to one informant,

Education highly had an effect on the age at marriage where people especially urban women are choosing to marry late and their attitudes have changed as they put more emphasis today on establishing their career and achieving their individual desired goals before entering into a marital union. It may also be noted here that singlehood is becoming increasingly more acknowledged; this is especially in the case of women who choose to remain single. Secondly, it is also because of education that the attitudes of people. Today gender roles are seen to be shared and exchanged by both men and women. Women are also seen to be aware of their economic independence by participating in the labour force outside the home and helping to generate income for their family and men have been more or less supportive of this as well. Furthermore, procreation is the main purpose for marriage among the Lotha and earlier the more children there were the more prosperous the family and clan would be, today however with an education along with the establishment of modern society, people's attitudes have changed also concerning the number of children to be begotten by a married couple.³ In this way, education perpetuates modern attitudes and new ways of thinking and thus contributes to creating a desire for change in the institution of marriage as well as family life.

² *Hanlam voko* (pig) - this is a traditional practice of the Lothas where the groom has to give a live pig to the bride's family. In return the bride will distribute a sizable piece of meat to her paternal pharety which in return will yield in cash or kind. This is to help the newlywed couple as they start a new home.

³ Oral interview with Athungo odyuo on 13th November 2022

EMERGING TRENDS OF MARRIAGE AMONG LOTHAS

The social institution of marriage among the Lothas has not remained the same; there have been emerging and rising trends. It is to note here that these trends pose as new challenges to marriage among the Lothas these are enumerated as follows:

I. Courtship pattern and new mate selection

Social media is considered to be unfavourable as it helps spread new modern ideas and values which may come in conflict with traditional norms and values, on the other it may be seen to be otherwise. In recent times, with social media being in the realm of the modern world in it is seen to have brought about emerging trends in the marriage system. The creation of new relationships by Lotha men and women through social media and online platforms has arisen in recent times. It is seen to be possible through modes such as the exchange of contact numbers online and then messages through text thereafter, which will then pass on to communication over the phone and then meeting in person. Such relationships are seen to not only be created but some maintained throughout a certain point of time until the establishment of marriage. This trend throws new light on the concept of mate selection and social interaction necessary in courtship to arrive at marriage. In this regard, mate selection and courtship patterns are taking on a different and modern picture. In addition, related trends include the existence of intimate and casual relationships between young men and women without any aim at marriage which can be widely noted today. One male respondent stated,

These days it is a trend to have a boyfriend and girlfriend from high school. For marriage, there are little or no stories of arranged marriage by the parents or relatives. The boy and the girl know each other for years and come to their parents if they want a church wedding, in some cases, they elope without the proper knowledge of their parents.⁴

II. Inter-marriage

While explaining inter-marriage, it is worthwhile to note that traditionally Lothas practices clan exogamy marriage and few records of village exogamy marriage were present mostly use for strengthening friendships. Instance intermarriage has been an emerging trend among the Lotha today; it is to say that it is an entirely recent phenomenon when it comes to inter-ethnic marriage. Although on the one hand, such unions are socially and culturally accepted, on the other hand, the same is not fully extended to Lotha's women when they are the ones marrying outside their ethnic community. This picture of inter-ethnic marriage is spoken in terms of a Lotha woman marrying a man belonging to another tribe, or one who is entirely non-tribal is shown disfavour. When asked about this situation, one male informant stated that

*"There are many cases where a Lotha woman marries a non- Lotha(non-tribal) man and just so that the children would get an ST certificate they give the title of the mother. But you will find these children some of them; may not even know the language too. Even when setting up businesses, if the non-Lotha man does not get a trading license/ land patta, he sets up the business in his wife's name because she is a Lotha"*⁵

The other case of intermarriage can be seen in terms of inter-religious or interdenominational marriages which again are widely prevalent today. While it has been noted, by some of the respondents that religion may not have a bearing on marriage, however, it has been highlighted that a couple, each professing different religions or denominations marriage takes place. Such couples then give freedom their children to choose and to profess any religion they would want to as they grow up. In this regard, inter-religious marriages may lead to one of two situations: (1) abandonment by one spouse of his/her religion thereby resulting in conversion or (2) a compromise between the two religious faiths. A female respondent whose husband belongs to the Hindu religion on whether her husband was willing to convert and when they got married. She says:

They talked about this issue a lot before marriage. Since the husband's family were against conversion and her family was not ready to let her married to a Hindu, they were cohabiting for many years. And only a few years ago the family conclude not forcing conversion on both of them and now they are legally married and had a son.⁶

An aspect of religious endogamy is the prevalence of social norms against inter-faith marriages for the very reason that according to Kalmijin it is believed intermarriage threatens the stability and homogeneity of the religious community (Kalmijin, 1991,790). In this regard, religious institutions like the Church sanction the norm of religious endogamy such as restrictions towards the solemnisation of inter-faith marriages. But it is not ignored that not all religious institutions do so with some appearing to be more flexible than others. The reason for this however lies in one of the sections laid down in the Indian Christian Marriage Act which states that a Christian marriage may be solemnised between persons, one or both who or are a Christian (Part I, Section 4 of Indian Christian Marriage Act, 1872). The phenomenon of intermarriage, whether inter-ethnic, inter-religious or

⁴ Oral interview with Mr Wonchio Tsanglao on 13th November 2022

⁵ Oral interviewed Mr James (name changed) on 9th December 2022

⁶ Oral interviewed with Mrs Jasmine(Name changed) on 2nd December 2022

interdenominational, is an emerging trend today and the reason for the same is greatly associated with the overall social changes observed in the Lotha society.

III. Increase in rate of separation and divorce

It can be noted that the term separation and divorce are used for both couples who are cohabiting as well as married couples who are officially registered. With freedom in the interaction of sexes seen at present, it is inevitable for premarital sex and pregnancy to occur and this can be seen among the youths who are in their early years of puberty. Earlier instances of “child marriages” or adolescent children entering into marital unions were not unheard of, but it is in recent times that such have been on the rise. When asked about why there an increase in divorce and separation in the Lotha society? One of my respondents stated that it is because quite several young boys and girls enter into the marital union at an early age. He further added that there is a less social stigma attached to child marriages in the way that it takes place in the Lotha society; they are treated with tolerance now. One female respondent opined that,

Now it had become a piece of everyday news because of the news about the husband leaving their wife in some family, while in other families the wife left the husband mostly because the husband have drinking habits and infidelity are a common thing. It's more like people know that it will happen and waiting for the news. It has become so common that the colony, family and relatives members have the stigma attached to it. It's acceptable as it comes knowing this is not the first and this is not going to be the last.

IV. Institution of single motherhood:

An increase in the rate of separation and divorce of women by men and sometimes by women themselves, has led by and large to a rise in the phenomenon of single motherhood among the Lothas. The number of broken marriages in Lotha society is on the rise and single mothers are increasingly finding it difficult to fend for their families. It is to be noted here that single motherhood is again not new today. The traditional Lotha society had an adjustment mechanism to accommodate single motherhood from the past. However, in the past single motherhood mostly occurred because the husband expired and single motherhood was a perfectly normal phenomenon. It was neither honourable nor dishonourable, but it was socially accepted, protected and secured within the family. However, the adversity that is tied to single motherhood is what is regarded to be recent and rising. As she takes upon herself the responsibility of looking after her children, a ray of light and hope is seen in the support and help accorded to her by her family. As one female respondent who is separated from her husband opined,

To be a single mother in a patrilineal Lotha society is not easy especially when you have children and you have a son. I fought in court legally for my child custody even though the ex-husband's family were against it and assert Lotha's customary law. I fought because I care about the future of my son, the father was an alcoholic and he was not a responsible father when we were staying together. I fought and I won the case as well because I'm working and I can take care of my son. My opinion is it is better to stay separated or divorce whether people say or talk about you. Because at the end of the day, it is only you who knows how much your are struggling living together.⁷

Thus although single motherhood on one hand is true to be a burden on the woman but nevertheless on the other hand it is seen to be socially accepted and continues to be observed.

V. Changing attitude towards marriage:

In recent times, as people are embracing and acculturating to modern and western culture and way of life, it has led to a change in their perception and attitudes towards marriage which may even make the establishment the same less likely. This can be noted in terms of the following pertinent aspects:

i. Change in priority:

Today an observed reality predominantly among the urban folk is the phenomenon of marrying late and the reason may be attributed to the utmost priority given to attaining financial stability through career building. This is true for both men and women, but particularly for women. This change goes in arrangement with structural changes that have taken place in the Lotha society such as the setting up of the modern economy and society. Individualisation is a new social norm in the modern world which shows individuals acknowledging and embracing their desires and goals and hence treating them to be primarily important than social commitments seen in the marital institution. Whereas marriage was earlier first and foremost an institution *sui generis* raised above the individual, today it is becoming more and more a product and construct of the individuals forming it (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, 8).

⁷ Oral interview on 19th November 2022

ii. Voluntary choice of singlehood:

With individualism being inculcated, individuals today have more freedom of choice concerning marriage. Marriage in the Lotha society has important implications in the society for both men and women because marriage brings expansion of the clan. Today while marriage among the Lotha has been and still is a social necessity, we however observe those, both men and women, who may willingly choose to not get married for reasons situational to them. For instance, living in a modern world and coping with its demands means marriage may not seem like a sensible option. At present, the stigma attached to an extinct family is not as old. Concerning Lotha women and singlehood Odyuo Avoni, advocate that we should celebrate both marriage and singlehood, and probe every woman to live a fulfilled life irrespective of their material status. Marriage is beautiful and that singlehood can be beautiful. Traditional norms that we do not practice because as we progress as a society, we stop practising harmful things- likewise, let us not pressure women and set thirty as the timeline (Odyuo, Avoni 2021, 226).

iii. Increase in awareness of risk:

This aspect may be one of the reasons for the occurrence of the above. Modern society has been recently looked at by sociologists as a risk society (Beck, 1992, Giddens, 1999). As threats and danger have always been a factor in human existence, risk has become a strategic organizing principle guiding both individual and institutional thinking and action in contemporary society (Hall, 2002, 175). In this regard, the concept of love and commitment to another person in the modern social world has also been attached to such risk. Committing to a late modern love relationship means uncertainty, taking risks by investing emotions and exposing vulnerabilities without any institutionalized guarantees (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 1995). Beck (1995) uses the term “risk consciousness” to talk about how people are less likely to enter into a marital union as they see and observe that marriages may end in difficulties and problems and thus the probability for separation and divorce to take place. Seeing how marriage is taking place in the Lotha society in recent times may instil in the minds of some people a certain level of fear and uncertainty towards such unfavourable circumstances and hence motivate them to not take the risk and get married.

II. Conclusion:

The emerging trends highlighted above show the present scenario of marriage among the Lotha and illustrate their extent within the purview of change and transition undergone by this social institution, thus highlighting the new challenges posed to the same. Factors like education, economic independence and interaction with other culture do contribute towards the change in marriage system. Now in most of the wedding we see influence of western culture like exchange of rings, white wedding gown, cake etc which appears a prominent in marriage functions. All most all the respondents are of the view that coming of Christianity among the Lothas did play a great role in transforming the social and culture life of the people and marriage is not an exception.

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